

*THE WORK OF
JOHN S. SARGENT*





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R.A.





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ATTACHED

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

NEW YORK



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CARMENCITA

THE WORK OF
JOHN S. SARGENT
R.A.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BY

MRS. MEYNELL



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WILLIAM HEINEMANN
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MCMIII

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LIST OF PLATES

Carmencita
El Jaleo
Madame Gautreau
Miss Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth
Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose
Mrs. Boit
Children of E. D. Boit
George Henschel
Mrs. George Batten
Coventry Patmore
M. Léon Delafosse
The Hon. Laura Lister
The Hon. Victoria Stanley
Lady Agnew
Sir Thomas Sutherland
Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton (full length)
Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton (head only)

Lady Hamilton
Mrs. George Cornwallis-West
Miss Carey Thomas
Miss Octavia Hill
Mrs. Carl Meyer and Children
Lord Watson
Asher Wertheimer
The Misses Wertheimer
Alfred Wertheimer
Younger Children of Asher Wertheimer
Francis C. Penrose, F.R.S.
Lady Faudel-Phillips
A Venetian Interior
Miss Daisy Leiter
Lord Ribblesdale
Mrs. Endicott
Mrs. Joseph Chamberlain
Duke of Portland
Duchess of Portland
Lady Elcho, Mrs. Tennant, and Mrs. Adeane
The Ladies Alexandra, Mary, and Theo Acheson
Mrs. Charles Hunter
The Misses Hunter
Lord Russell of Killowen

The Hon. Mrs. Charles Russell
Mrs. Leopold Hirsch
W. Graham Robertson
Johannes Wolff
President Roosevelt
A Spanish Dance
Joseph Jefferson
Lady with White Waistcoat
Signor Mancini
H. G. Marquand
Mrs. Marquand
M. Paul Helleu
Bedouin Arab
Egyptian Girl
Italian with Rope
Egyptian Woman (coin necklace)
Capri Girl
Mrs. Meynell
Study: Profile
Study for a Portrait
Portrait Sketch

INTRODUCTORY NOTE



VEN the critic of some twenty years ago, to whom the drama of life seemed "literary" and therefore not fit for painting, must confess to an interest in the subject of a picture when that picture is a portrait.

The painter's perception of the character of his sitter is an essential part of his work, even of his execution. There is an insight in portraiture of which no one is afraid to speak. Even when, in the last century, the crime of "literature" was discovered, this was not accused of "literature", and no man charged this kind of "reading" with that sin. Most justly did the portrait painter pass unrebuked.

To-day indeed we are disposed to admit within the sphere of the art of painting all things that the eye can reach, and its field is wide. The kingdom of the eye contains all that is simply visible of the history and drama of man, all his beauty, all the signs of his character, and the action and attitude of his passions : these things, as well as the "pattern" made by his figure and his furniture composed. It contains also what the imagination of the eye can see—the apparition, the vision, and the dream. The mere name of "vision" marks it as subject to the dominion of the eye.

That man pays to literature a disproportionate homage who assigns to it all the show and exposition of humanity in disaster and felicity; and does to art an answering wrong. Nay, because literature claims what is invisible and lodges within, art might well assert the greater right over what cannot be hidden but needs must make itself manifest, whether in the eyes of surprise, or in the movement of violence, or in the spiritual condition of a man, and the experience of his race, as they are noted in his aspect. These things are to be seen by a silent art.

Nor, as was said but now, has recent criticism—penultimate criticism for the present, and it may be new again not many years hence—denied this human and civilized intelligence to portraiture. It has even granted to the portrait painter, as master of one of the intelligent arts, the praise due to a master of the intellectual arts, calling him psychologist. It is, however, by a degree of violence that this name is given to a painter. Here indeed, something does seem to be taken from literature. Psychology must be expressed and stated in explicit words, and with explicit words painting has no need to deal. Therefore one may hesitate to name Mr. Sargent, as he has been named, a psychologist: that is, in his work, for obviously we are not to pass beyond the picture. He proves himself rather to be observant and vigilant, nay simple, as a great artist must be. How many and various qualities, mental and physical, meet to prepare that direct and single contemplation of the world might give us matter for surmise; for contemplation there is

—something more than observation; and something more than perception—insight.

Apart from this slight error (if it be one) of giving to painting the name of psychology, every interest is allowed by one consent to the subject of portraiture. The likeness of man or woman is a great thing to achieve; if it lives at all it lives so long! It gives long life, a life of ages, to all the incidents of this individual face, its age, its health, its consciousness, its race. It is evident that Mr. Sargent has keen sight for the signs of the races; there is as it were the knack of Spain in his "Jaleo", something neither Italian nor Oriental, but proper to the spirit of the populace of this one peninsula, a somewhat deep-toned gaiety, a laugh in grave notes, and a kind of defiance, at least in the women. If the men have the nature of tenors, the women there have the nature of contraltos. In the "Javanese Dancer" the flat-footed, flat-handed action of the extreme East—a grace that has nothing to do with Raphael—is rendered with a delightful, amused, and sympathetic appreciation: the long code of Italian conventions disappears: the slender Javanese dance has weight—a confession of gravitation, whereas the occidental dance makes light of it. All that is alien here, the painter sees in the quick. When Mr. Sargent paints an American—the portrait of Mr. Roosevelt, for example—the eye has the look of America, the national habit is in the figure and head. No caricaturist has so much as attempted this aspect, because the caricaturist apparently never sees it, but thinks he sees

something else—happily, for the real signs of nation and race are too fine and good for inhuman burlesque : we may be glad to see them reserved for worthy and in truth more humorous eyes. Every man in his humour is every man in the humour of his fathers and of the soil. In like manner, Mr. Sargent paints an Englishwoman with all the accents, all the negatives, all the slight things that are partly elegant and partly dowdy—one can hardly tell which of those two—the characteristics that remove her, further than any other woman, from the peasant and the land, further than an artificial Parisian : Mr. Sargent perceives these keenly, never forcing the signs, for force would destroy anything so delicate. It is perhaps almost necessary to have been an Anglo-Saxon child living abroad in order to have the nicest sense of the aspect of an English lady (I use the noun, of course, intentionally) ; if you have had that little experience—and it was Mr. Sargent's, *à propos*—having also had a child's profound apprehension of personality, you have the most perfect perception of her Englishism. There is one of Mr. Sargent's portraits, a most charming one, of a lady very slightly and beautifully faded, sitting, with her slender hands in view. There is nothing to connect her with Italy, and the fancy is quite gratuitous ; but she is so peculiarly English that one can hear her mispronounce, with a facile haste, some Italian word with a double consonant in it. Another Englishwoman's portrait, the masterly picture of Mrs. Charles Hunter, with its suggestion of refinement and fresh air, courage, spirit, enterprise and

wit, is subtly English. And purely French, with a French character lying out of the view of the caricaturist, is the fine clear portrait of Madame Gautreau, the firm and solid profile, with decision, not weakness, in its receding forehead and small chin. The Hebrew portraits present more obviously, but also not less subtly, the characters of race; so do all those pictures or drawings, in which Italians are studied. The laugh of the young man pulling a rope is perfectly national.

The race, nevertheless, does not overpower the least of the personal traits that are, personally, worthy of record. Mr. Sargent takes at times a sudden view, and thus makes permanent, too singly, one aspect of an often altering face. It seems to be so, for example, in the portrait of Coventry Patmore, in which that great poet's vitality wears an aspect too plainly of mere warfare. Even here one may hesitate, conjecturing that some other eyes may see in this likeness traces of "the many movements" of a poet's nature. But "one thing at a time" is the right rule for much portraiture; and yet again, it has perhaps been obeyed here where it should not. Elsewhere the accident of a moment that is not important may be something too passing for the dignity of a portrait; but assuredly this is noted only when there has been nothing to note that has a graver claim to "immortality." I rather report another's murmuring than my own (the murmuring of one who prizes Mr. Sargent's genius in such a degree as no one can outdo) if I aver that he tells us, in a portrait, now and then, such a fact as that a man has or has not slept well. When he has something finer to show us, I do

not think Mr. Sargent shows us *that*; but the graver conditions of life are so visible to him, and their aspect is so plain in the reflection of his picture, that it is told of one portrait that a physician made a diagnosis from it and named a malady until then uncertain—a disorder that has a characteristic effect upon bearing and expression. The ordinary eye might see in that expression nothing but a kind of demonstrative health. It is moreover interesting, in the case of this portrait, to know that the painter, at work on one of the finest pictures of his wonderful gallery, a picture magnificently arranged, was keen as well as large of sight, and saw both the pictorial beauty of the accessories and the difference between the look of another woman of the world and the look of this one, who wears her jewels with an almost secret difference. If the story is true, well; if it is not true, it has been aptly invented by one who must know something of Mr. Sargent's manner of seeing and of perceiving what he sees. An example of the portrait of a moment that is full of spirit and action is that of Mrs. George Batten, which breathes the last note of a song—a note of Tosti's, one might guess. With this we may compare the repose of the standing portrait of Lord Ribblesdale, in which one hardly knows whether face or figure is more expressive of the poise of life—the unstable equilibrium by which a man is thus admirably erect, so that nothing stable and secure seems so upright, and nothing in flight more full of life. Another pause is that in the face of Eleonora Duse in the quick sketch in oils of which the reproduction is one of the

treasures of this book. The face is quite tranquil, so that other faces look uneasy in comparison, and the eyes under their sombre lids have, in this brief sketch, the most direct look in the world. The great tragedian gives in her portrait, as in her art, the impression of an incomparable sincerity, and faces us from the yonder side of the common human custom of intercepted, veiled, retreating or hesitating looks. She does not find these minor disguises to be worth while. Mr. Sargent's sketch is peculiarly moderate, and the reproduction happily keeps all the distinction he has made between the one large light on the forehead and the lower lights on the nose, cheek, and chin, so that it is the modelling of the forehead that is most important, but one part is as simple as another.

Those who would have refused to the art of painting—I think the idea began to be sent broadcast by the essay of a French critic dated some time after the middle of the nineteenth century or when the Romantique painters were, mostly, dead—those, I say, who debarred this art from dealing with any form of drama (for fear of “literature”) should consistently bar the attitude of action. The angel with the palm must not fly down to Tintoretto's Ursula leading her multitude of martyrs. Titian's tempestuous angel of the Annunciation must not run to the Virgin, with clapping wings and arm aloft under the cloud of an impatient sky; nor must his Dionysus spring to Ariadne from the car. Inasmuch as very few modern designers have the power of movement, this incapacitating rule would serve the turn of the time well enough, and no doubt has made shift to excuse the languor of those who

had not energy. No need to discuss now the inconstancy of that rule which allows a wheel to turn, or a fountain to play; a wheel to turn, but not the living pinion of Gabriel, and a fountain to play, but not the muscle of Hercules. Mr. Sargent heeds no such inauthoritative law; and when he has not the vital stillness of a portrait, he has such a spirit of movement as that of "El Jaleo" and "A Spanish Dance," the latter with its Goya-like, straight-topped throng in the background. He achieves not only the beauty of the attitude, but the power of the action, of the dance.

Amongst the pictures of children, the portrait of The Hon. Laura Lister takes its place with the most beautiful painted in all centuries since it was first held worth while to paint that childhood which the fathers and mothers of old were in haste to see securely past. Portraiture came comparatively late in the Italian schools—Venice apart—and seems to console or flatter their decline; and the portraits of children came last. But in Spain, Holland, Venice, and England, the great age was an age of portraits, and in our time the best work, since the landscapes of Norwich and Barbizon came to an end, is portraiture again. Portraits of childhood and an exquisite study of twilight and lantern-light, with the fine violet tints that artificial light lends to evening air, and with white as lovely in its coolness as the white of Titian in its gold, are united in the Garden picture, "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose". It is strange that any one affects to make light of truth and to look elsewhere for decoration, when nature and truth can look so beautiful.

The coming of a great painter is so rare, and his contemporaries are so much and so often taken by surprise by the annual exhibition of his genius, that it must be difficult to them to assure themselves of what he is. The work of Sir Joshua Reynolds is ranged and ranked, and every Englishman has the leisure of all his life, and of the longest of its years—the young years of education—for placing himself, in his turn, in the orderly ranks of admirers. But the works of a great living master appear and appear, they are scattered; comparison with masters of the past is too sudden, and there has not been time for a general consent. Nevertheless any student who has been called to give to the living painter the long and deliberate attention reserved in general for the dead, may perhaps be allowed to go in advance and to take on himself the usual office of numbers. Even so a great artist has no little privation, during his life, of the honours he is earning. We know that it was so with Reynolds, for the praise he had in his time is not to be compared with the homage he has in ours.

In the case of Mr. Sargent one supreme quality is so evident and so all-intelligible, that his work could never be neglected. It is a quality for all eyes and all intelligences. "The many cannot miss his meaning," said James Russell Lowell of his own great contemporary author, "and only the few can find it." The many cannot miss the life of Mr. Sargent's painting, if the masterly method that brings that life to light is for students only to understand, or even only for painters. It is not necessary that the laity

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should know much of this; and so much said about "technique" outside of the studios is surely little to the purpose. The artist does not join in the prattle with a public that is better employed in simple appreciation. Every art and craft has its methods for its own use. There must, for example, be much technique in the safe driving of a cab in Piccadilly, and assuredly we admire, and we trust and we profit; but the cabman keeps his technique to himself and makes no appeal whatever to his "fare", does not ask that client to understand him. One professor only—the playwright—seems inclined to cry out about his troubles—the difficulty of composing his scenes. If our friends in front did but know, he cries in effect, how exceedingly difficult it is to arrange these things, they would not complain of a tedious fore-scene; so much has to be doing behind; pray, a little more patience and technique! There is, however, more dignity in keeping separate places.

We spectators can hardly be anything else than ignorant, even with a smattering—ignorant of the art of the painter. A certain education, as has been said, makes us able to see well, and that is our art and needs our attention. It is our contribution, and we owe it. Life, light, form, and colour in a picture, and indeed in nature, must have our intelligent eyes; but there is something transcendent in the power of him who shows us the great quality of life so plainly that the simplest of us cannot but see. The life of Mr. Sargent's portraits is so much more than the trivial vivacity which

takes a careless eye, it is so truly vitality, that the eye meeting it, though it may be simple, must not be silly, must not be vulgar. Therefore when the comments of an English crowd seem dull to the listener, as they do, that crowd seems yet to retrieve itself, and makes no small amends, even at the Royal Academy, by generally saying of a splendid Sargent that it has life. As for colour, the love of it is with the greater number of us, but it needs definite education. Mr. Sargent is not distinctively a colourist, although he has truly exquisite colour, whether in his wonderful flesh, or in his whole system of shadows, or in some beautiful blue of a decorative sky. But I think a painter who is more distinctively a colourist pauses upon the colour of a shadow, for example, as Sargent does not seem to do. Rembrandt is called a chiaroscuroist rather than a colourist, but he is surely proved a colourist also, by his dwelling upon the colour of some shadowed background. Mr. Sargent's colour is rather something on the way to some beauty and truth of value and relation. Nature is full of passages of mystery, lapses of light and lapses of detail. A comparison is suggested to me of this beautiful "lost and found" in the shadowy world we see, with the momentary lapse of the lark's song when we hear him sing at his height, and its momentary recovery. There are in all natural scenes under our vision a hundred opportunities for pausing on the beauty of these retreats; the painter visibly delights in them—the colourist chiefly for their colour. Mr. Sargent has not this delight passionately, though he has it most delicately, and

we may suppose his chief felicity to be in perfect relations and in subtle modelling.

It is interesting to note that one art which seems to be deprived of these passages of mystery, has yet found a means to recover them—the art of sculpture. It is true that sculpture, like architecture, if it has no mystery in its making, has (being round and solid and invested by lights and shadows, and attended by distance) the mysteries of nature herself. Yet a mystery of the artist's own has a value and suggests his imagination. In Michelangelo's unfinished "Giorno" and in another great figure of his in Florence, half hewn from the block, the mystery is less his than ours; for it is due to the incomplete condition of a work greatly begun by an illustrious hand. But surely M. Rodin, in our own day, has given to the complete work a partial veil, a lost and found, a pause and an interval, full of life. It is a pleasure to associate this high contemporary name with that of Mr. Sargent, none the less because on his visit to London M. Rodin recognized the supreme master of painting in the portrait group of the three Misses Hunter, "that bouquet of flowers." From the strong and delicate modelling of Mr. Sargent's heads, a sculptor might make a bust.

"There are two methods of laying oil-colour which can be proved right: ... one of them having no display of hand, the other involving it essentially and as an element of its beauty. Which of those styles," Ruskin writes to Dante Rossetti, "you adopt, I do not care." Perhaps if he had written this with

revision in a book, and not hastily in a letter, Ruskin would have changed the word "display" for one of more dignity. The beauty of the "power of hand" made evident stands clear of the soliciting action of "display" as we use that word currently. It is a manifestation indeed, and explicit, and the manifestation is veritably the beauty. "Display" seems to suggest a secondary grace, an afterthought, and once more to divide style, which Ruskin obviously did not intend to do. But apart from this hasty word, the saying has a significance not only for those who persist, against his own profession, in believing that Ruskin held only one method "proved to be right," and this the method he mentions first, attributing it to Holbein and Van Eyck; but for more serious readers and students. Of all the arts our impulse may be to protest that there are not two methods but many. Essentially, nevertheless, there are two. The equality of the two peaks, the two summits, has but lately been proved aloft in the highest places of music. So unlike are the two "methods" there, that one might say two arts of music, two muses, rather than two methods. For when the great modern art of emotional expression first shook the hand and took the breath (its earliest thrill or grimace, I think, may be seen in a picture in the lower church at Assisi), the other, the unshaken art, was not abolished. It continued, and having shown the Crucifixion in mosaic, the Passion in literature, the Lamentations in music, with a steadfast soul and no tremor, it achieved the purely perfect and beautiful melody of Mozart, which expresses nothing, the melody of the unbroken

heart. Music has to serve us with examples of the dual art because her examples are perfect. But the examples of painting also are true; and as the mind of art was divided, so also was her manner—the laying of oil-colour, as Ruskin says, has two right ways. The unchanging quarrel bickers on under changing forms and various names, from generation to generation, because the world is slow to confess that there are two right ways—for fear, perhaps, lest it should be committed to many. Manifestly one sect, being right, cannot convince nor even convict the other, this also being right. There has never been peace since the art of criticism began. That is, mere writers on art will not be friends, whereas we do not conceive that Hogarth had enmity of heart towards Velasquez, or Tintoretto towards Holbein. “Twain is the mind” of art, and her hand has two laws.

It need not be said, by-the-by, that beauty of execution is inseparable from all really fine painting, and that the work which has it not is not the best of either of two right and lawful schools; for it is of power, and not of beauty only, that Ruskin writes. Hogarth’s execution is very beautiful, but his “display” of power of hand is so suppressed as to escape some admiring eyes.

Mr. Sargent is eminent on the summit of one of these equal heights. He has indeed shown in modern times how high that height reaches—the height of the “power of hand” made manifest, the manifestation being an essential part of the beauty of that power. He is therefore one of the family of Velasquez, and no less than his chief heir.

A. M.

PLATES

EL JALEO

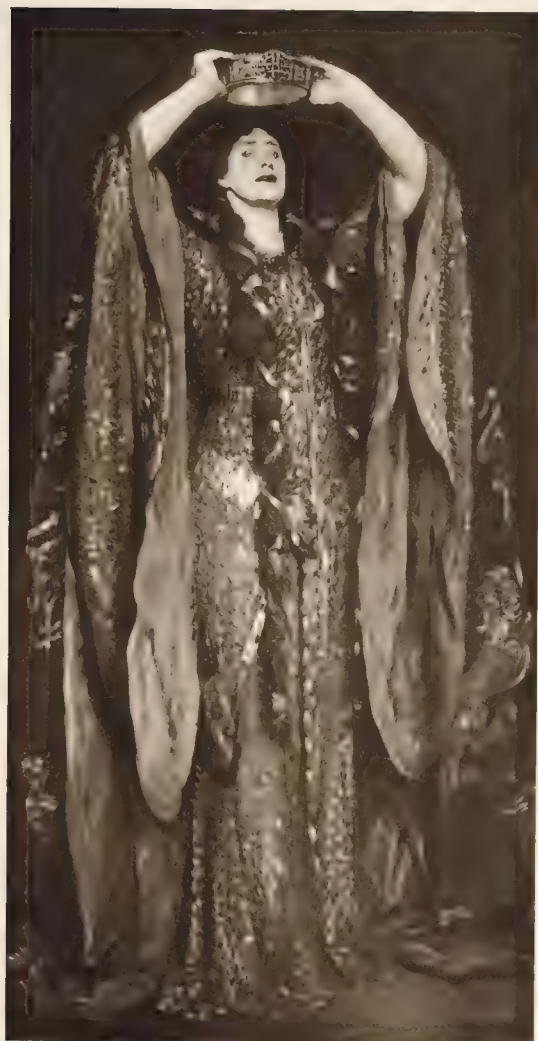


MADAME GAUTREAU

THE GARDEN



MISS ELLEN TERRY
AS LADY MACBETH



CARNATION, LILY
LILY, ROSE

THE
MUSEUM



MRS. BOIT



CHILDREN OF E. D. BOIT

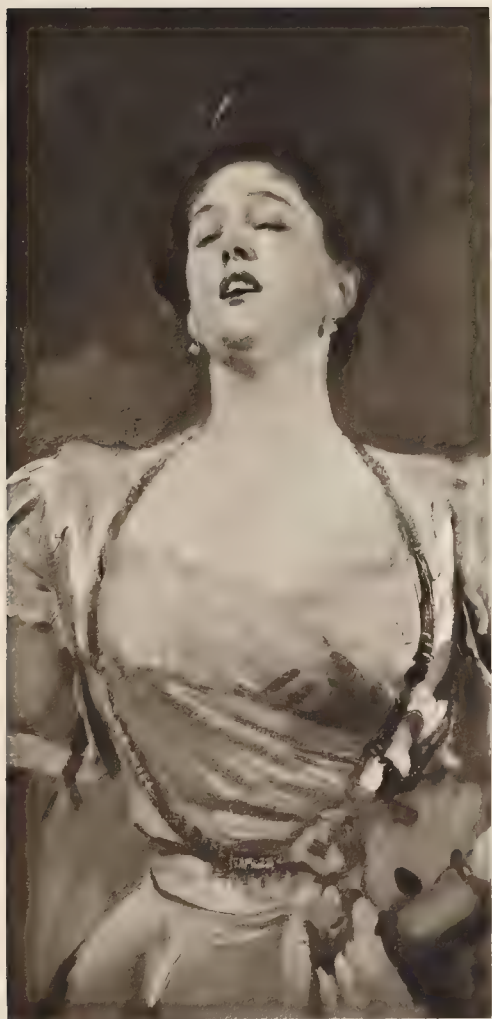


GEORGE HENSCHEL

THE END OF THE WORLD



MRS. GEORGE BATTEN



COVENTRY PATMORE



M. LÉON DELAFOSSE



THE HON. LAURA LISTER



THE HON. VICTORIA
STANLEY



LADY AGNEW



SIR THOMAS SUTHERLAND



GEN. SIR IAN HAMILTON
(FULL LENGTH)



GEN. SIR IAN HAMILTON
(HEAD ONLY)



LADY HAMILTON



MRS. GEORGE
CORNWALLIS-WEST



MISS CAREY THOMAS



MISS OCTAVIA HILL

THE HISTORY OF





MRS. CARL MEYER
AND CHILDREN

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
PRESS



LORD WATSON



ASHER WERTHEIMER

THE END OF THE WORLD



THE MISSES. WERTHEIMER



ALFRED WERTHEIMER

THE END OF THE WORLD



YOUNGER CHILDREN OF
ASHER WERTHEIMER





FRANCIS C. PENROSE, F.R.S.



LADY FAUDEL-PHILLIPS

THE GREAT WALL



A VENETIAN INTERIOR



MISS DAISY LEITER



LORD RIBBLESDALE



MRS. ENDICOTT



MRS. JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN



DUKE OF PORTLAND

THE HISTORY OF





DUCHESS OF PORTLAND



LADY ELCHO, MRS. TENNANT
AND MRS. ADEANE



THE LADIES ALEXANDRA,
MARY, AND THEO ACHESON



MRS. CHARLES HUNTER



THE MISSES HUNTER



LORD RUSSELL OF
KILLOWEN



THE HON. MRS. CHARLES
RUSSELL



MRS. LEOPOLD HIRSCH



W. GRAHAM ROBERTSON



JOHANNES WOLFF

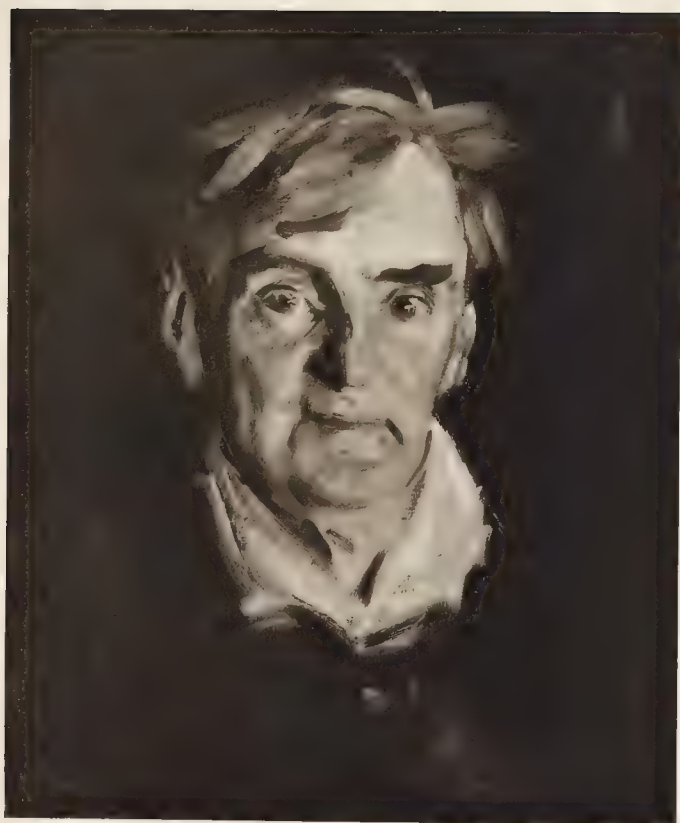
PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

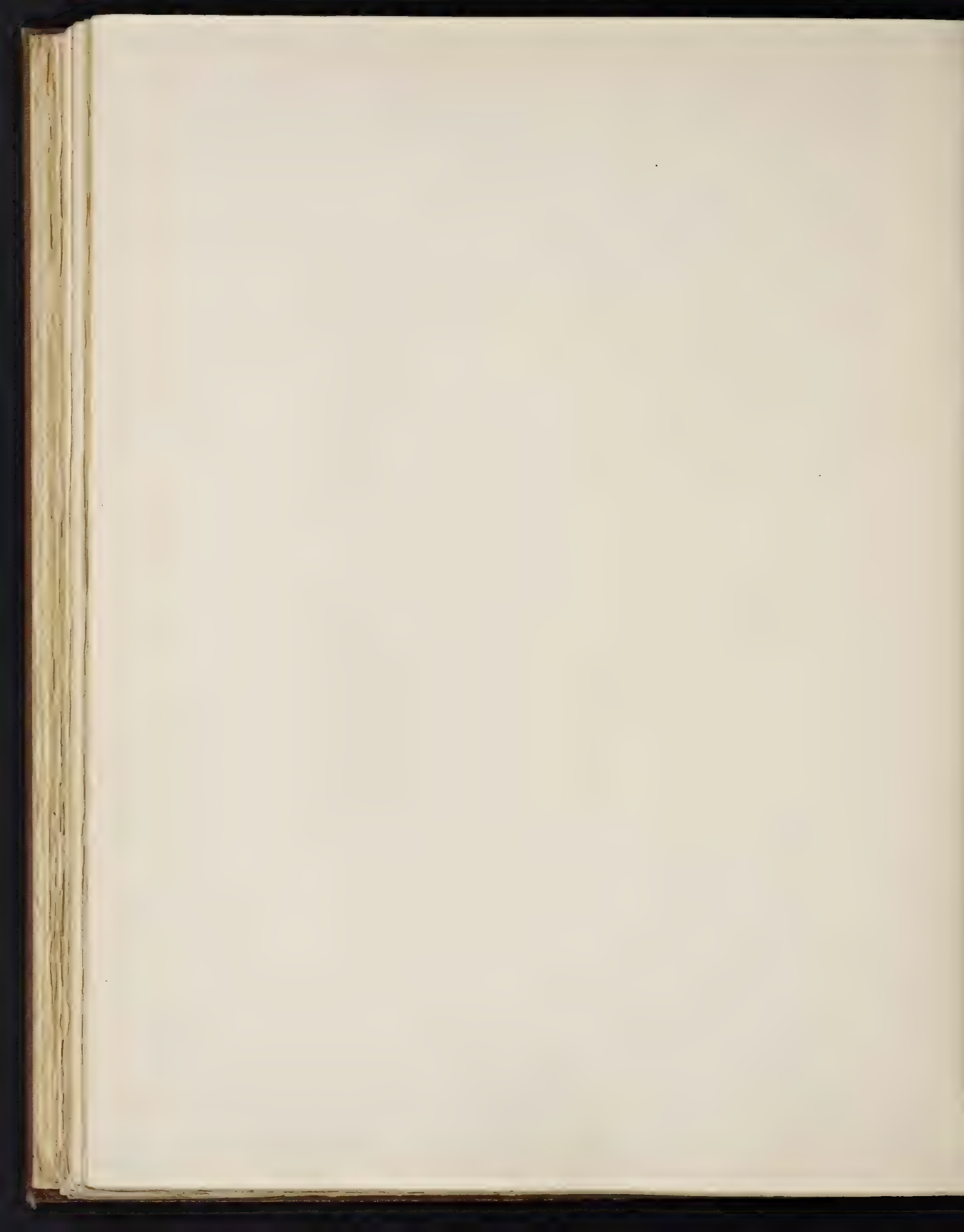


A SPANISH DANCE



JOSEPH JEFFERSON





LADY WITH WHITE
WAISTCOAT



SIGNOR MANCINI



H. G. MARQUAND



MRS. MARQUAND



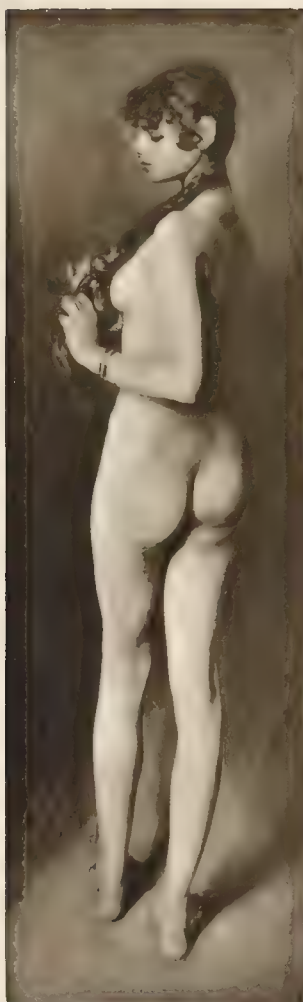
M. PAUL HELLEU



BEDOUIN ARAB



EGYPTIAN GIRL



ITALIAN WITH ROPE



EGYPTIAN WOMAN
(COIN NECKLACE)

1861



CAPRI GIRL



MRS. MEYNELL



STUDY: PROFILE



STUDY FOR A PORTRAIT



PORTRAIT SKETCH



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